

The History of Migration in Museums: between History and Politics

Venue: Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand, France.

Dates: 17-19 November 2011

Conference organisers: EHIC (EA 1087)

Submission deadline: 2 May 2011.

If the history of migration lies at the heart of many museums in the 'New World', moulded by colonisation and imperialism, it is also a major issue for European states, as demonstrated by the controversy surrounding the opening of the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in Paris. This conference will examine museum spaces — local, regional, national — which focus, wholly or in part, on the history of migrations, including both internal migration, emigration and immigration. Museums are sites of memory per se, and are also sites of exchange, and / or contact, in short effecting mediation between various social groups, they may also be sites of contest and riposte.

Conference papers might address, but are not limited to, the following issues:

— Museums and their social, economic, political and cultural environments. In museums the paths of various interest groups and organizations intersect, yet they may not necessarily be compatible. Museums have to combine the orientations endorsed by the structures on which they rely, those of their paymasters, those of their potential visitors / consumers, those of their curators, and those of the cultural policies from which they may well spring. In them coalesce commercial, political and ideological interests, often sources of compromise and contradictions.

— The history of migration in museums and identity construction. Implicit models of national identity frequently underpin the migration narratives constructed in such museums, for instance those founded on notions of hybridity and transitory identity and implying potential redefinition and reshaping; or alternatively those based on notions of persistence and continuity and, consequently, on stable and enduring identities. How are migration narratives — frequently transnational — woven within such paradigms by museums, be they local, regional or national? Conversely how are representations affected by such processes / phenomena related to globalisation?

— The influence of dominant policies and discourses on such representations. How do such institutions, where a public memory is constructed, respond to changing governmental initiatives and discourses such as cultural diversity, social inclusion, integration, assimilation or multiculturalism? Do these institutions — national, regional, local — promote social cohesion and inclusion through their treatment of migrations? Do they give expression to alternative histories, contemporary debates and minority voices? Another approach might address the cultural constructions that host societies project about themselves — celebrating their openness and long-term policy (ies) of immigration.

— Museographical choices and migration stories. What are the narrative devices used to relate itineraries (use of metaphors symbolising liberation, celebration of benefits, contribution with respect to culture and knowledge, re-birth or obstacle, resistance and rejection)? What is the place given to journeys in those narratives? Is a balance struck between individual testimony and the contextualised representation of migratory waves? To what extent and how are local communities involved in or consulted for the making of exhibitions? Are attempts made at highlighting periods and, if so, on what

grounds? To what extent and how are artefacts used: selection, display and staging, iconography of migration, absence of artefacts?

— The history of migration and museums as memorial spaces. The process of memorialisation is inherent in the activities of history and social museums through the work of collection, conservation and transmission of a collective heritage. How is the 'duty to remember' interpreted? Do material and immaterial heritage commingle and how? How are the memorial functions of museums integrated: hagiography, martyrology, mourning of the past, silences, emphases leading to questions and disputes?

We are looking for papers from a broad spectrum of museum practitioners and scholars (history, geography, museum studies, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology) and we hope that the sessions will be international in scope leading to fruitful comparisons. We intend to publish an edited volume of essays based on selected conference papers.

Language: the language preferred for papers is English but papers in French will also be accepted if extensive summaries in English are provided to help those struggling with the oral presentation.

If you are interested in proposing a paper, please submit your proposal (approximately 500 words) for a 20-minute presentation and a brief bio (50 words) by 2nd May 2011 to the following address:

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